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GRO Summer Internship Final Report
Environmental Justice Showcase Pilot
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My summer internship took place in the Office of Civil Rights and Urban Affairs at the EPA Region 1 Headquarters in Boston, MA. Under the guidance of Deborah Brown, Special Assistant to the Director of Civil Rights and Urban Affairs, and Amy Braz, Region 1 Environmental Justice Coordinator, I provided technical support for the Region's Environmental Justice Showcase Pilot in Bridgeport, CT.

The Environmental Justice Showcase Pilot program is a national initiative to find ways to address environmental justice issues. While environmental justice is of particular importance to the Office of Civil Rights and Urban Affairs, the integration of environmental justice into all departments within the EPA has been made a national priority by EPA Administrator, Lisa Jackson. My internship helped to continue these efforts by providing a template to address environmental justice issues across the nation.

The purpose of my project was to research and report on demographic traits and health data within the city of Bridgeport, CT, and for New England; to compile a database of community and educational resources to be used by those working on the project; and to obtain and analyze air and water permits in Fairfield County, CT. The research identified neighborhoods within Bridgeport that were the most strongly affected by environmental factors and those areas became the areas of focus for the showcase. Over the past year, Bridgeport has been the site of many projects, including rain garden training to prevent storm water runoff, a water resources education program for students attending high schools in Bridgeport, and the implementation of a community gardening program.

I experienced only minor difficulties over the summer, and when I encountered a problem, my mentor and project advisor were easily approachable. Thinking of situations as small challenges instead of as problems made these experiences fun instead of stressful. For example, obtaining asthma rate data from public health offices was challenging because such data had the potential to violate privacy rights of local citizens. By working with the public health office and with the assistance of EPA employees, these data were successfully collected without sacrificing the anonymity of the patients.

I was able to use many of my existing skills throughout my internship. I had previously worked with census and other sets of demographic data and was able to start immediately on collecting data with little training. I also came with experience in organizing meetings and working with community groups, which was helpful. These skills have improved, and I will continue to use them in the future. In addition to the skills that I brought to the internship, I was able to acquire a variety of skills that I will be able to use in the future, including the use of EJ View, an internet software program used to identify areas potentially facing environmental justice issues. I also learned how to obtain school and health data and how to map such data using GIS. In addition to these skills, I received formal training on Federal statutes, Brownfields, tribal A\awareness, and healthy homes. I also completed 24 hours of health and safety training.

I came to Boston with a vague understanding of how the federal government operated. My internship experience helped me to develop a greater understanding and respect for the EPA and its mission. The EPA tackles large national issues with limited resources and works efficiently to improve environmental issues across the United States.

Working in Boston dramatically increased my confidence in my abilities. I was given a lot of freedom to compile and present data in ways that I saw fit and was given positive feedback from my mentors. My internship also helped me to realize how passionate I am about environmental justice issues. As a result of my internship, I intend to pursue a career in the environmental justice field upon the completion of graduate school.

Overall, I had a very positive internship experience. My advice to future GRO interns would be to say yes. When you are offered a chance to work on another project, to receive additional training or to meet other interns, take it. 12 weeks goes by very quickly and the more involved you allow yourself to become, the more you will get out of the internship experience.